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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 26 November 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. ALSTON

CONTENTS

Consideration of reports (continued)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (continued)

celand (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS (agenda item 4) (continued)

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT

Initial report of Iceland concerning articles 1 to 15 (continued) (E/1990/5/Add.6, E/1990/5/Add.14, HRI/CORE/1/Add.26, E/C.12/1993/WP.10)

1. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), continuing to respond to questions raised in connection with article 6 of the Covenant in the list of issues (E/C.12/1993/WP.10) relating to the initial report of Iceland (E/1990/5/Add.6), said in reply to issue No. 9 that, regrettably, developments over the past two years had not been favourable. The average annual unemployment rate, which until then had varied between 0.5 and 1.5 per cent per annum, had risen to 3 per cent in 1992 and was expected to rise to 4.5 per cent in the current year. The situation was a completely new one for his country and was causing great concern to the Government, which, in a policy declaration made public in April 1992, had expressed willingness to establish broad cooperation with all social partners in tackling the problems. Under the 1993 budget, road construction projects had been brought forward and ISK 1,500 million had been allocated in addition to the ISK 2,260 million previously set aside for road building in order to maintain employment. ISK 500 million were to be devoted to employment-creating measures in the Sudurnes area in the south-western corner of Iceland. The measures concerned were to be carried out in collaboration with the local authorities in the area and other executive bodies. Local authorities countrywide had also guaranteed payments of ISK 500 million to the Unemployment Insurance Fund to be spent on projects to promote employment. Under a special governmental measure, ISK 60 million were to be spent on increasing the number of jobs available to women, since, as had been pointed out at the previous meeting, the rate of unemployment among women was slightly higher than among men. For further information, he referred members of the Committee to Iceland's first report on its implementation of ILO Convention No. 122, which had been sent to the ILO the previous week.

2. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland), replying to issue No. 10, reiterated the information already provided at the previous meeting to the effect that trade union membership as a condition for entitlement to unemployment benefits had been abolished by legislation which had entered into force on 1 July 1993. Consequently, all workers who were not members of trade unions were now entitled to unemployment benefits.

3. The CHAIRPERSON noted that the delegation of Iceland had thus concluded its replies to the written questions under article 6 and invited additional questions or comments from members of the Committee.

4. Mr. CEAUSU said that the new legislation which made it possible for all workers to receive unemployment benefits was a matter of considerable satisfaction to the Committee. It was to be hoped that the Althing would continue to review the law with a view to bringing it into line with the provisions of the Covenant. The Act of 1 July 1993 was a positive example of

what Governments could do in order to shoulder their responsibilities under the Covenant. Similar action could, he felt, be taken in the area of full equality between the sexes as regards remuneration for work.

5. Mr. WIMER ZAMBRANO inquired about the social impact of unemployment on immigrant workers in Iceland.

6. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) said in reply to Mr. Ceausu's comment that during the past decade his Government had faced up to the difficulties encountered in the field of equality between the sexes with regard to wages and had tried to implement a large number of measures, as reported to the ILO, the Council of Europe and, more recently, to the United Nations. The ILO had made a point of expressing its appreciation of the measures taken by the Government in that area.

7. Replying to Mr. Wimer Zambrano, he said that only 1.9 per cent of Iceland's workforce was composed of immigrants, about one half of whom were of Nordic origin. Immigrant workers from other parts of the world numbered not more than 700 or 800 in all. Their problems, especially as regards the repayment of housing loans and so forth, were of course being borne in mind, but he could not report any special measures being taken at the present time.

The meeting was suspended at 10.40 a.m. and resumed at 10.55 a.m.

8. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland), replying to questions concerning the role of the Ombudsman by Mr. Badawi at the previous meeting, said that although the Ombudsman's decisions were not binding on administrative authorities, they were widely respected and almost universally adhered to within the Administration. In that connection, she wished to reiterate that the new legislation on administrative procedure, which was to enter into force on 1 January 1994, would secure certain rights for citizens in their dealings with the administration. Mr. Badawi had also asked whether the remarks in the Ombudsman's report drawing attention to the need for a review of human rights provisions in the Constitution had been followed by any specific measures. The answer to that question was in the negative, but only because, as already stated, a committee was already working on a revision of the Constitution and would, it was hoped, complete its work in the not too distant future.

9. Mr. Simma, Mr. Alvarez Vita and Mr. Texier had inquired into the status of the Covenant in Iceland's legal system. She appreciated the interest shown in the matter and, by way of clarification, drew attention to paragraph 54 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.14) stating that international treaties did not assume the force of domestic law even if ratified. Human rights conventions had not been incorporated into Icelandic law and therefore could not be directly applied by the courts. The Minister of Justice had recently introduced draft legislation for the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in Icelandic law, and the future status of the Covenant would no doubt depend on developments in that respect. It was vital to keep in mind, however, that Icelandic law could be considered to be in conformity with the Covenant and other international treaties to which Iceland was a party. The Government considered itself duty-bound to ascertain that domestic legislation was in conformity with ratified instruments. The practical possibilities of any contradiction were therefore minimal. Furthermore, Icelandic courts were increasingly applying the provisions of international

conventions, irrespective of their status in the Icelandic legal system, in their judgements, and had recently gone so far as to disregard certain provisions of domestic law which they considered to be contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights. She hoped that her answers also covered Mr. Kouznetsov's question as to whether reference to rights under the Covenant could be made before Icelandic courts. In thanking the Committee once again for its interest, she assured members that their concerns had been duly noted and would be reported to her country's authorities.

10. Mr. ALVAREZ VITA thanked the representative of Iceland for the explanation just given and said that, while he had no doubt of the determination of Icelandic courts to respect the rights set forth in the Covenant, he continued to be concerned by the statement contained in paragraph 55 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.14) that in cases of disagreement, domestic law generally took precedence. There was thus no guarantee that Iceland's obligations under the Covenant would be honoured by the national courts. Much as he appreciated the transparency of the information supplied and the assurance that the Committee's concerns would be transmitted to the authorities, he felt that practical guarantees of compliance with the Covenant, both now and in the future, had to be provided.

11. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) said that the legal situation in Iceland was the same as in a number of other European countries. What mattered, surely, was whether the provisions of the Covenant or other international agreements were or were not being applied in practice; the question of their incorporation in national legislation would seem to be somewhat of a side issue.

12. Mr. ALVAREZ VITA stressed that he was in no way implying that the Covenant's provisions were not being upheld in Iceland; his opinion was quite the contrary. The point that concerned him, and one which had also been raised in the Human Rights Committee, stemmed from the clear indication that, in the case of any conflict between international and domestic law, the latter would prevail. The sphere of domestic application of the Covenant was thereby at risk, since there would be no way of invoking its provisions in the domestic courts.

13. The CHAIRPERSON recalled that, in countries having a monist legislative system, such as most Latin American countries, the United States, France and some other European countries, the provisions of international treaties were, on accession by the State party, directly incorporated into domestic legislation. But such treaties did not automatically apply in the domestic legislation of States having a dualist system. The existence of both systems accorded with the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. But a domestic violation of a treaty's provisions, even in a State where domestic law prevailed in cases of conflict, would still be a violation in terms of international treaty obligations. Mr. Alvarez Vita was right in stressing that the ability to invoke the Covenant's provisions in domestic courts was an important question. The Committee was not, however, in a position, vis-à-vis any State party, to call on it to adapt its domestic legislation, especially since there appeared to be no known instance, in any monist-system State, of recourse to the Covenant in domestic courts.

14. Mr. ALVAREZ VITA said that care must be taken to avoid any misunderstanding. The Committee must take a balanced approach to all the reports submitted to it and should not refrain from raising, in any instance, questions which it had raised in others. The Chairman had referred to the two systems of relating international to domestic legislation. His own country, Peru, was among those in which ratified international instruments were immediately applicable in domestic law. International law was increasingly being acknowledged in most jurisdictions, and was recognized in the Vienna Convention as applicable, with the exception of the norms of jus cogens, to matters relating to customary law.

15. Therefore, while acknowledging Iceland's readiness to apply the spirit of the Covenant's provisions, he felt it important to stress the need to guarantee their implementation in law.

16. Mr. BADAWI said that even in a monist system - a system that his country, Egypt, would shortly be adopting - the provisions of international instruments could be given effect only through suitable enactments or amendments in the domestic legislation; it was the latter that had to be invoked in all cases.

17. Mr. TEXIER said that the most important issue was a State party's willingness to apply the Covenant's provisions. He had no doubt about Iceland's willingness in that regard; on the other hand, the Committee had examined the case of one State party in which the Covenant's provisions were being clearly violated despite the fact that the Covenant was incorporated in the State Constitution.

18. Mr. GRISSA said that he doubted whether it was up to the Committee to say what legislation a State party should apply, especially since the domestic law could be closely linked to the national religion and culture, for example in the laws prevailing in Muslim countries as they related to the status of women and inheritance.

19. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO said that the Convention was unequivocal in regard to the status of women. Matters such as cultural traditions could not be regarded as paramount when considering its domestic application. The experience of her own country, one whose history had a strong Muslim influence, had shown that such matters could be resolved with understanding.

20. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), replying to issue No. 11 on the implementation of article 7 of the Covenant, said that Act No. 55/1980 covered conditions of work and compulsory payments to secure pension rights. The law contained a paragraph relating to monitoring and adjustment machinery in respect of minimum wages. As he had said at the previous meeting, the bases and terms negotiated between the social partners were recognized as minimum conditions, of universal validity; any contracts between individual employers and employees stipulating conditions below those specified were invalid. In accordance with the Icelandic Federation of Labour's wage agreement of 3 January 1992, the minimum wage was US$ 756 per month, or US$ 4.36 per hour.

21. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland), replying to issue No. 12 on article 7, stressed that the Icelandic social insurance system was based on residence, not participation in the workforce, which meant that the entire population was

covered. It was possible to take out insurance against accidents during housework, and to make an entry on the income tax return accordingly.

22. Replying to a question by Mr. Badawi, she stressed that the voluntary scheme related to accident insurance for persons doing housework on a personal basis, not for employees in domestic service, who were covered by the general scheme.

23. Mr. TEXIER, referring to the tables in paragraph 81 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6) concerning violations of health and safety regulations, asked what penalties were applicable against an employer who failed to heed warnings about infringements.

24. He asked how the problem of Sunday working was approached in Iceland, since, although Sunday was officially deemed a rest day according to the report, there was clearly pressure for some Sunday trading, as in many other countries.

25. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) said that in Iceland, the social partners were allowed wide scope for negotiating wages and conditions of work among themselves within a general framework of legislation, which was more detailed in certain fields, such as labour. Matters relating to health and safety at work were covered, inter alia, by Act No. 86/1980, a chapter of which set forth the sanctions applicable, mainly through fines, or even compulsory closure by the Health and Safety Administration, in cases of non-compliance with the relevant regulations.

26. The matter of Sunday working was covered, in most cases, by clauses in the agreements between the social partners. The usual arrangement was to treat Sunday as a rest day. In that regard, Act No. 86/1980, in chapter 9, specified minimum intervals relating to rest periods and holidays; details could be made available to the Committee.

27. Mrs. IDER said that in table 12 on page 31 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6), relating to hours of work, the minimum period in respect of unskilled workers was shown as over 50 hours; she asked whether there was any move towards reducing that number of hours. She also noted that Iceland's social insurance scheme provided very comprehensive cover. The cost of benefits must be considerable in relation to wage levels, which were not especially high; she wondered, therefore, how efficient the scheme was found to be, and whether any studies had been carried out in that regard.

28. Ms. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland) replying to Mrs. Jiménez Butragueño's question, said that paid domestic work was covered by employment insurance but that domestic work done by a person who elected to stay at home was not covered unless he or she contributed voluntarily. Any person who had an accident in the home was, however, covered by health insurance. The benefit was higher in the case of a person who contributed voluntarily to the insurance scheme.

29. In reply to Mrs. Ider's question, she explained that it had been the policy of all Icelandic Governments for decades to ensure that there should be access to health insurance regardless of income. Such a system was, of course, expensive, but people liked it and were willing to pay. No change in policy was under consideration.

30. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO inquired whether, in view of the increase in unemployment, the Government had any plans to introduce work-sharing.

31. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), commenting on working time in general, said that people in Iceland worked long hours. That had been especially so during the 1980s, when the economy had been overheated and workers had been able to work as many hours as they liked, within the limitations imposed by the legislation on safety and health, which required that a worker should have 10 hours of continuous rest. At the end of the 1980s, the Government had been concerned about the long working hours and had appointed a Committee to consider the matter. However, as a result of the recession working hours had decreased and the problem was less serious.

32. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland) said that in Iceland periods of unemployment had occurred in the past. Workers had been dismissed, but the Government believed that the present situation was only temporary.

33. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), responding to the question on trade union rights contained in issue No. 13, said that article 73 of the Constitution of Iceland stated that societies might be formed for every lawful purpose without previous authorization. No society might be dissolved by an act of Government, but it might be temporarily suspended, in which case an action for dissolution must immediately be brought. The article was interpreted very broadly and was considered to protect freedom of association in various ways. The question of whether it protected the right of trade unions to establish national and international federations had never been an issue, since the right was considered to be self-evident. In 1916 the trade unions had established the Icelandic Federation of Labour, which had for many decades cooperated extensively with similar organizations in other Nordic countries and was a member of the Nordic Trade Unions umbrella organization. It was also a member of the European Trade Union Confederation and of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

34. Mr. CEAUSU, referring to paragraph 127 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6), asked what public authority was competent to ascertain whether a trade union satisfied the conditions required for the acquisition of legal personality. Moreover, according to paragraph 136, two thirds of the employees must be members of a trade union in order for the latter to be recognized as a negotiating party. If that was so, it seemed to him to be excessive and might serve as a brake on trade union freedom.

35. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) said that he would need more time to take a closer look at those questions. The Icelandic Federation of Labour included some 200 different trade unions.

36. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland), commenting on issue No. 14 concerning the implementation of article 9 and, in particular, ways of financing the social security scheme, said that the Icelandic social security system was financed by income from a social security tax levied on all salaries and by direct contributions from the Treasury. The income from the social security tax was channelled mainly to the financing of pension insurance and occupational injuries insurance, but a certain proportion went to unemployment insurance. Direct contributions from the Treasury further financed pension insurance, occupational injuries insurance and health insurance. In addition, the

unemployment insurance fund received income from the Treasury amounting to three times its income from the social security tax. Additionally, if the fund's obligations required more money than its regular income could supply, the Treasury was responsible for providing it.

37. In the case of special pension funds, the employer contributed an amount equal to 6 per cent of the employee's salary and the employee 4 per cent. Private insurance did not exist, except for health insurance to cover travel abroad.

38. With regard to the reasons for and the financial consequences of the abolition of individual contributions referred to in articles 65 and 67 of the Social Security Act, mentioned in issue No. 15, she explained that a political decision had been taken on that matter in the early 1970s, when insurance contributions had been fixed amounts regardless of income. The Government had considered that the burden placed on low incomes was too heavy and had changed the system accordingly.

39. As for issue No. 16, she said that no social sector or group in Iceland was not protected by health insurance. The only group that could be unprotected by pension insurance were people who moved for the first time to Iceland after the age of 67 and therefore had not had an opportunity to earn the right to a pension. As far as was known, no such persons were at present living in the country.

40. With reference to issue No. 17, she explained that there were two different types of widow's benefit. First, there was a payment for six months for all widows or widowers under 67. If a child under 18 was living with the widow or widower, benefit was due for a further 12 months. A woman over 50 whose husband died was entitled to a widow's pension until the age of 67.

41. Mrs. JIMÉNEZ BUTRAGUEÑO inquired whether widow's benefits were payable to all widows regardless of whether they worked or not.

42. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland) replied that such benefits were payable regardless of participation in the workforce. A bill to make it possible to link benefits to income was due to be presented to the Althing.

43. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), commenting on his country's implementation of article 10 of the Covenant, said that extensive information on the housing situation had already been given in paragraphs 129-239 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6). If members had any specific questions to ask, he would try to answer them.

44. Mr. ALVAREZ VITA noted that widows over 50 were entitled to benefit but widowers were not. That appeared to amount to discrimination against men. Moreover, according to paragraph 253 of the report, a mother having lawful domicile in Iceland was entitled to a six-month pregnancy subsidy at each birth, but a father was not. He would like to have some more information on that point and also on whether abortion was permitted in Iceland and, if so, whether health workers were obliged to participate in it or could be excused for reasons of conscience.

45. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland) replied that six-month maternity benefits were payable to the mother only. The benefit went with the child. There had been a case in which a mother had died in childbirth and the father had received the benefit. Abortion was legal in Iceland, subject to certain conditions. However, health professionals were not obliged to participate in it if they did not wish to do so.

46. Commenting on issue No. 19, she said that prenatal and post-natal health services were part of the core services of the health care centres. From the end of the first trimester pregnant women regularly came for check-ups, once a month until the last trimester, when visits became more frequent. Following the birth of the child, the home nursing services arranged for the new mother and child to be visited regularly at home for the first two or three months. Thereafter the mother was expected to bring her child to the health care centre regularly for check-ups and immunizations. Employers were obliged to move a pregnant woman within the workplace if her or her baby's health was endangered by her type of work, with no loss of salary. All those services were available to all mothers.

47. It was not permissible to dismiss a pregnant woman from work except for valid reasons other than her pregnancy or the fact that she was on parental leave, which lasted for six months after the birth of her child. The only reasons considered to be valid were a major reorganization at the workplace or an imminent shut-down. It should be borne in mind that Iceland had one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. Self-employed women had the same right to parental benefits as women in salaried work.

48. The insurance benefits for mothers whose husband had died or left home included a motherhood allowance paid to widows, unmarried mothers and divorced women who maintained their children under 18 years of age, and a child allowance paid for each child under 18 years of age either of whose parents was deceased or in receipt of a disability pension. For one child the motherhood allowance was ISK 1,000 a month; for two children, ISK 5,000; and for three or more children, ISK 10,800. The child allowance was ISK 10,300 for each child. If the husband had left home, he was obliged to pay the amount of the child allowance as a child support payment. The State social security system actually made the payment and was reimbursed by the husband. If the husband did not pay, the State was responsible for claiming the sums due.

49. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), replying to issue No. 20, regarding measures to prevent trafficking in children and adolescents, and their maltreatment, exploitation and abandonment said that the Penal Code, in articles 194-210 covered penal aspects of that question. Act No. 58/1992 concerning the Welfare of Children and Youths had come into force on 1 January 1993. It aimed to ensure satisfactory conditions for the development of children and young people by strengthening the role of the family in their upbringing and taking appropriate measures to protect individual children. For the purposes of the Act, children were defined as individuals under the age of 16, and young persons as individuals aged between 16 and 18. The main innovations in the Act concerned the overall administration of child welfare matters, responsibility for which had been transferred from the Ministry of Education and Culture to the Ministry of Social Affairs. As the Ministry of Social Affairs was in charge of the local authorities, which appointed child welfare

committees, it seemed natural that those matters should be administered by the same ministry. The Ministry of Social Affairs was in charge of supervising the work of the child welfare committees throughout the country, for training them and preparing reports on work in the field of child welfare. The Act also introduced changes into the working procedures of the Icelandic Child Welfare Council, prescribed the obligations of the child welfare authorities towards children and young persons, laid down far clearer provisions on adoption and introduced requirements regarding the handling of cases to ensure greater security under the law for all those affected by the decisions of the child welfare authorities.

50. The new Children's Act No. 20/1992 had introduced extensive amendments, the most noteworthy of which were the abandonment of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and the introduction of provisions to allow parents to agree on joint custody in the event of divorce, or of separation in the case of a common-law couple.

51. In the spring of 1991 Act No. 48, relating to Play Schools, had come into force. Play schools were intended to cater for children from the end of their mother's maternity leave, i.e. from the age of six months, until the age of six, and sought to enhance the overall personal and social development of children.

52. Developments during the period from 1991 to 1992 included the establishment of a treatment home for young drug users, a home for homeless children and a home for children who posed a danger to themselves and others.

53. Returning to the issue of trade union rights covered by article 8 of the Convention, he wished to make a clarification. The conditions described in paragraph 136 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6) which a trade union had to meet in order to be recognized as a negotiating party, only applied to trade unions representing civil servants. The statement made in paragraph 126 of the same report, to the effect that unions of employees or employers were not required to comply with any specific formal conditions when they were formed applied to all other categories of workers. Prior to the introduction of Act No. 94/1986, concerning wages and terms of employment of civil servants, civil servants had not been allowed to strike.

54. Regarding the provisions concerning work by children and adolescents, covered by issue No. 20 (b), he said that the employment of children and young persons was governed by chapter X of Act No. 86/1980, concerning working environment, health and safety in the workplace. For the purposes of the legislation, a child was defined as an individual aged under 16 and a young person as an individual aged from 16 to 17. Article 60 of the Act prohibited the employment of children for any work other than light and danger-free work. Children of 14 and 15 were prohibited from working on dangerous machinery or under dangerous conditions. The Board of the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health had issued guidelines defining the concepts of light and danger-free work, dangerous machinery and dangerous conditions.

55. Children aged 14 and 15 could not work longer than adults working in the same field, and the working time of young persons was limited to 10 hours

per day; the Act also prescribed that they should have 12 hours' rest per day. Failure to comply with the law and the relevant regulations were punishable by fines or heavier sanctions if applicable.

56. The Ministry of Culture and Education was currently carrying out extensive research into the situation of children which, when completed, would make it possible for the Government to give more detailed statistical information on the number of children and adolescents actually in employment, and the sectors in which they were employed.

57. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland), replying to issues Nos. 21, 22 and 23, said that whatever yardstick was employed, the standard of living in Iceland was very high and there had been no significant change in the past five years. It was hard to determine the per capita GNP of the poorest 40 per cent of the population, as the statistics available did not break down income in sufficient detail to answer that question. However, she noted that income differentials in Iceland were extremely narrow.

58. The paper she had distributed on the previous day, containing the replies by the Ministry of Health and Social Security in respect of the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (document without symbol) gave information on the food situation in Iceland, a copy of a parliamentary resolution on Icelandic nutrition policy, a study of nutrition in Iceland, a description of the nutritional institutions in Iceland together with a case study on Icelandic nutrition policy which had been presented at the First European Conference on Food and Nutrition Policy in Budapest, in October 1990.

59. A national nutrition survey had been carried out in 1990, one year after the Government's adoption of a national food and nutrition policy. The survey, involving some 1,240 people aged between 15 and 80 had found that while typically western in most respects, the Icelandic diet retained some characteristics of a subarctic region. No European nation ate more fish per capita than Iceland, and food of animal origin weighed heavily in the Icelandic diet. Grains or fruits were not grown in Iceland and vegetable production was mostly limited to potatoes and greenhouse plants. Consequently, grains, fruits and vegetables were of less importance than in most European countries, despite substantial imports of various foods. The dietary pattern was reflected in the relative proportion of energy nutrients found by the survey, and the importance of fat and protein, which, in contrast to many western countries, was not an entirely modern development.

60. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), replying to issue No. 24 said that as far as the Government was aware there were no homeless individuals and families in Iceland, nor any individuals and families without adequate housing or access to basic services. Special legislation existed for the protection of tenants. A recent review of that legislation by the Government had led to the presentation before the Althing of a new bill designed to enhance legal protection for tenants.

61. The rise in interest rates had meant that there were a number of people whose housing expenses were beyond their means. The Government had carried out a survey of people who were unable to meet their mortgage payments, and

had estimated their number at approximately 1,200. The Government was preparing measures to assist them. There were no persons in Iceland classified as irregular housing occupants.

62. Mrs. PALSDOTTIR (Iceland) added that the problem of people unable to meet their mortgage repayments had to be seen in the context of the particularly high proportion of home-owners in Iceland, where approximately 80 per cent of people owned their home. There was a low-cost rental sector, in the form of municipally owned flats.

63. Mr. TEXIER said that Iceland was clearly a privileged country on account of its high average income, the lack of social inequality and the considerable proportion of home-owners. Nevertheless he inquired whether there had been any cases of expulsions in Iceland, and if so, how expulsions were effected.

64. Mr. MUTERAHEJURU, said that, with regard to the implementation of article 10 of the Convention, he had formed the impression, from reading the report that the State intervened to a considerable degree in family affairs, in the education of children and in their protection. There was little information on the family as such, and he asked what was the balance of responsibility, between the family and the State, for the upbringing of children and whether State intervention did not constitute an interference in the liberty of the family. He also asked how divorce was regulated in Iceland.

65. He noted from paragraph 241 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6) that all activities for the protection of children and young people were dealt with by child welfare committees and a child welfare council. He asked what category of children came under the care of the committees and the council.

66. Paragraph 145 of the report seems to give the impression that more attention was focused on mothers and children than fathers, and he asked what was the role of fathers in the Icelandic family.

67. He was somewhat perplexed by the reference in paragraph 244 to "general ignorance by parents of how to bring up a child, complex personal difficulties afflicting parents, alcoholism or a poor emotional state" and asked for clarification of the concepts. In particular, he asked what was the extent of alcoholism in Iceland, and if it was pervasive, why that was so in such an affluent and relatively problem-free society.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.